

July 1, 2011

Marlene H. Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554



Re: CC Docket 96-128; MM Docket 00-168

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On June 29, 2011 Cheryl A. Leanza and Sara Fitzgerald met with Commissioner Michael Copps and his advisors Josh Cinelli and Margaret McCarthy on behalf of the United Church of Christ, Office of Communications, Inc.

For the bulk of the meeting we discussed Commissioner Copps' long record of support for the media reform and media justice movements, and for UCC OC Inc.'s annual Parker Lecture.

We also generally encouraged the Commissioner to grant the Wright Petition in CC Docket 96-128, which would reduce the cost of calling incarcerated individuals and reduce financial burdens on the families of prisoners. We emphasized that a federal decision on this matter would set a good example for states and that the Commission has jurisdiction in this matter. We distributed the attached document on this issue.

We discussed the findings of the recent Commission report on the Information Needs of Communities with respect to broadcaster disclosure. In particular, we discussed that the Public Interest Public Airwaves Coalition has long supported electronic broadcaster disclosure as described in the report and that we would support prompt Commission action to implement the report's recommendations in that regard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl A. Leanza', is written over a light gray, stylized outline of the same signature.

Cheryl A. Leanza  
Policy Advisor, United Church of Christ, OC Inc.



## Prison Telephone Rates: A Moral Issue

Imagine if the family of someone in prison were required to pay for the cost of prison. Imagine instead, that the costs paid by families were not regular payments, but instead they paid a tax on the cost of communicating with a loved one behind bars. Every word a grandmother utters to her grandson on the telephone would be another payment to his jailers. Unfortunately, in the United States, this unconscionable scenario is no flight of fancy—the federal government has ignored entreaties to prohibit this practice for almost 10 years.

**How does this happen?** Routinely in this country, prisons and jails charge exorbitant rates to companies who offer secure telephone service for prisoners, and those rates are passed on to the families and loved one who pay for the calls. These telephone companies are often required to bid against one another to offer telephone service—whoever offers the biggest payment to the prison gets the right to offer calls. Prisoners don't have choice like the rest of us, they get to use only the telephone company selected by the prison.

**How much can prisoners' and their families pay for calls?** According to a recent study, for long distance calls, many families can pay a connection charge of \$3.00 or more plus per-minute rates up to \$.89 – resulting in \$10 to \$17 for a 15-minute collect call. These costs are outrageous when many Americans access services that are either unlimited long-distance plans, or, charge 3 cents per minute with no connection fees. For a prisoner's family, a 15 minute call per week could cost \$120 per month.

**Are these rates justified by security needs?** No. A number of states have reformed their systems, bringing down rates to as low as 5 cents per minute.

**Don't we want to encourage contact with prisoners while they are incarcerated?** Yes, sadly the federal policy is not only inhumane, but it reduces the chances that prisoners will successfully reintegrate into society when they are released. Strong social networks outside prison help former inmates succeed as law-abiding citizens when they get out.

**How can I help? How can I find out more?** Come to the United Church of Christ's media justice web page, [www.uccmediajustice.org](http://www.uccmediajustice.org)

*In Matthew 25:35-40 Jesus explains that the way we treat the most lowly in society are emblematic of the way we treat God, including those in prison. "I was in prison and you visited me," Jesus says. "When did we visit you?" ask his followers. Jesus replies: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, so you did it to me."*

